

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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R 120720Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2187
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 KABUL 2495

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AF, IR, PFOR
SUBJECT: AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS HAVE STEADILY GONE DOWN-
HILL SINCE PRESIDENT DAOUD'S VISIT TO TEHRAN MARKED A HIGH POINT
IN APRIL 1975. THE IRANIANS HAVE INFORMED THE AFGHANS THAT THEY
WILL NOT EXCHANGE INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION FOR THE HELMAND
WATERS TREATY UNTIL THE AFGHANS NEGOTIATE WITH THEM CONCERNING
THE DISPOSITION OF FLOOD WATERS. THE AFGHANS SAY THAT THEY ARE
NOT OBLIGED TO PROVIDE TO IRAN ANY WATER IN EXCESS OF THAT
STIPULATED BY THE TREATY AND THAT THEY INTEND TO PROCEED WITH
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FLOOD CONTROL DAM IN THEIR TERRITORY.
MEANWHILE THE IRANIANS ARE APPARENTLY HOLDING UP FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN, AND THE AFGHANS ARE TELLING THEM
THAT THEY CAN KEEP THEIR MONEY BECAUSE THE AFGHANS CAN GET HELP
ELSEWHERE. THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR HAS TOLD DAOUD'S BROTHER THAT
THE SHAH IS "ANGRY", AND THE AFGHANS REGARD THIS STATEMENT AS
BOTH INSULTING AND PETTY. THE AFGHANS HAVE RENEWED THEIR INVI-
TATION TO THE SHAH TO VISIT KABUL, BUT THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR
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IN KABUL DOUBTS THAT THE SHAH IN HIS PRESENT MOOD WILL ACCEPT
THE INVITATION. THIS ATMOSPHERE IS NOT UNIQUE IN THE LONG HISTORY
OF THE AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS BUT IT IS DISAPPOINTING THAT THE
PROGRESS MADE IN 1973-75 IN IMPROVING THEIR RELATIONS APPEARS
TO HAVE BEEN HALTED. THERE IS NOTHING MUCH FOR US TO DO EXCEPT
TELL THEIR LEADERS IN BOTH TEHRAN AND KABUL THAT WE HOPE THEY
CAN RESOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS AND CONCENTRATE ON THEIR COMMON

INTEREST IN REGIONAL SECURITY AND STABILITY. END SUMMARY.

2. I HAVE HAD LONG CONVERSATIONS IN THE PAST WEEK WITH AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABDULLAH AND IRANIAN AMBASSADOR DAVOUDI CONCERNING THE CURRENT STATE OF AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS. ABDULLAH SPOKE TO ME ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM PRESIDENT DAOUD, WHEREAS MY CONVERSATION WITH DAVOUDI WAS AT A SOCIAL OCCASION. THEIR REMARKS CONFIRM THAT THE STATE OF AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS IS AT THE LOWEST POINT SINCE JUST AFTER THE JULY 1973 COUP WHICH BROUGHT DAOUD TO POWER.

3. THE PRINCIPAL POINT AT ISSUE IS THE OLD CHESTNUT OF THE HELMAND RIVER WATERS. ABDULLAH TELLS ME THAT IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHALATBARY TOLD AFGHAN AMBASSADOR GHAZI ON APRIL 4 THAT IRAN WILL NOT EXCHANGE INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION SO AS TO BRING THE TREATY INTO FORCE UNLESS THE AFGHANS ARE WILLING TO NEGOTIATE OVER THE DISPOSITION OF FLOOD WATERS. DAVOUDI THINKS THAT THE AFGHANS PUT A HELMAND DAM (THE KAMAL KHAN DAM) IN THEIR RECENTLY PUBLISHED SEVEN-YEAR DEVELOPMENT IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR CONTROL OF THE HELMAND WATERS AND TO PUT OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THE RATIFICATION OF THE TREATY. THE AFGHAN POSITION IS THAT THE TREATY CALLS FOR AFGHANISTAN TO GUARANTEE TWENTY-SIX CUBIC METERS PER SECOND OF WATER TO IRAN AND THAT AFGHANISTAN HAS SOLE CONTROL OF ANY REMAINING WATER. PROCEEDING FROM THIS LIMITED COMMITMENT, THE AFGHANS INTEND TO BUILD THE KAMAL KHAN DAM ON THE LOWER HELMAND IN THEIR TERRITORY FOR FLOOD CONTROL. THE IRANIANS SAY THAT THIS DAM WILL CAUSE MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE BY DRYING UP THE LAKES ON THE AFGHAN-IRANIAN BORDER. THE AFGHAN RESPONSE IS THAT THE WATER IN THESE LAKES IS USED "ONLY
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FOR BIRDS" AND THAT THE AFGHAN INTENTION IS THAT IT BE USED TO IRRIGATE LANDS WITHIN AFGHANISTAN FOR HUMAN USE. ABDULLAH REMINDED ME THAT PRIME MINISTER ETEMADI FELL FROM POWER IN MAY 1971 BECAUSE IT WAS BELIEVED HE WAS OFFERING TOO MUCH HELMAND WATER TO IRAN AND THAT THE LAST ROYAL PRIME MINISTER, SHAFIQ, WAS ACCUSED BY HIS POLITICAL ENEMIES OF ACCEPTING IRANIAN BRIBES FOR MORE WATER.

4. THE ATMOSPHERICS OF THE KHALATBARY STATEMENT TO GHAZI HAVE ALSO ANNOYED THE AFGHANS. ABDULLAH SAID THAT KHALATBARY TOLD GHAZI THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE KAMAL KHAN DAM WOULD BE AN "UN-FRIENDLY ACT". FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL GHAUS, WHO WAS PRESENT WHEN I SAW ABDULLAH, SAID THAT KHALATBARY HAD BEHAVED IN AN "ARROGANT" MANNER. IN ADDITION, IRANIAN AMBASSADOR DAVOUDI RECENTLY SAW PRESIDENT DAOUD'S BROTHER NAIM AND TOLD HIM THAT THE SHAH IS "ANGRY". THE AFGHANS REGARD THAT REMARK AS BOTH INSULTING AND PETTY.

5. ATMOSPHERICS HAVE BEEN EQUALLY TROUBLESOME TO THE IRANIANS.

DAVOUDI TELLS ME THAT THE SHAH'S ANGER IS CAUSED BY AMONG OTHER THINGS AFGHAN REFUSAL EVER PUBLICLY TO COMMEMORATE LAST YEAR'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY. THIS PROBABLY DID SET THE STAGE FOR CONVERTING WHAT MIGHT HAVE REMAINED A DISAGREEMENT OVER A TECHNICAL PROBLEM INTO AN ENGAGEMENT OF PERSONALITIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 KABUL 2495

LIMDIS

6. THE AFGHANS BELIEVE THAT THE IRANIANS ARE HOLDING UP THE TRANSFER OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AS A MEANS OF EXERTING PRESSURE ON AFGHANISTAN NOT TO BUILD THE KAMAL KHAN DAM. ABDULLAH MENTIONED THAT THE IRANIANS ARE OVERDUE IN PAYMENTS TO AFGHANISTAN FOR EIGHT OR NINE PROJECTS, INCLUDING THE \$50 MILLION CEMENT PLANT TO BE BUILT BY AMERICAN FIRMS IN KANDAHAR. ABDULLAH SAYS THAT THE IRANIANS HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT UNDER THESE CONDITIONS THEY CAN KEEP THEIR MONEY AND THAT AFGHANISTAN CAN FIND AID FROM OTHER SOURCES SUCH AS THE ARAB WORLD. ABDULLAH ALSO SAYS THAT THE AFGHANS HAVE PROPOSED THAT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE AFGHAN-IRANIAN JOINT ECONOMIC COMMISSION BE HELD SOON. DAVOUDI TELLS ME THAT HE IS NOT AT ALL SURE THAT THE SHAH WILL AGREE TO THIS MEETING'S TAKING PLACE.

7. DAVOUDI TELLS ME IN ADDITION THAT IRAN IS APPROACHING THE INDIANS TO TRY TO PERSUADE THEM NOT TO GO THROUGH WITH THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE KAMAL KHAN DAM THAT THEY HAVE REPORTEDLY OFFERED THE AFGHANS. THE IRANIANS ALSO, ACCORDING TO DAVOUDI, INTEND TO TALK TO THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT WAYS TO WEAN AFGHANISTAN FROM THE SOVIET UNION.

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8. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD, BOTH SIDES ARE ALSO ACCUSING INDIVIDUALS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF MALICIOUS INTENT. DAVOUDI ACCUSED AGRICULTURE MINISTER WASEFI AND HIS BROTHER, WHO IS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, OF CONDUCTING A CONCERTED ANTI-IRANIAN CAMPAIGN WITHIN THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT. ABDULLAH TOLD ME "OFF THE RECORD" THAT THE REAL ENEMIES OF IRAN OF GOOD AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS ARE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY OF MINISTER OF COURT ALAM.

9. ABDULLAH SAYS THAT THE AFGHANS STILL HAVE OPEN AN INVITATION TO THE SHAH TO VISIT KABUL. THE IRANIANS INFORMED THE AFGHANS THAT THE SHAH WOULD NOT MAKE OVERSEAS TRIPS DURING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING THE YEAR ENDING MARCH 20, 1977. DAVOUDI TOLD ME THAT IT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT THE SHAH WILL VISIT AFGHANISTAN IN HIS PRESENT MOOD.

10. BESIDES THE HELMAND WATERS PROBLEM, THERE ARE OTHER ISSUES PLAGUING AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS. THE MOST PROMINENT ONE IS THE QUESTION OF ILLEGAL AFGHAN WORKERS IN IRAN. WE HAVE HEARD ALL KINDS OF ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBERS OF THESE PEOPLE. DAVOUDI'S ESTIMATE IS THAT THERE ARE 500,000 ILLEGAL AFGHANS IN IRAN WHO RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN APPROXIMATELY \$1,000,000 PER DAY FROM THEIR EARNINGS.

11. I HAVE TOLD BOTH ABDULLAH AND DAVOUDI THAT THE U.S. HAS NO INTENTION OF GETTING INTO THE MIDDLE OF AFGHAN-IRANIAN DIFFERENCES. I STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THIS PART OF THE WORLD AND THAT WE STRONGLY HOPE THAT AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN WILL COMPOSE THEIR DIFFERENCES IN THE INTEREST OF REGIONAL SECURITY AND STABILITY. DAVOUDI'S RESPONSE TO THESE COMMENTS IS BASICALLY TO THROW HIS HANDS UP IN THE AIR AND INDICATE THAT HE IS CAUGHT BETWEEN PROUD AFGHANS AND AN ANGRY SHAH AND FEELS HELPLESS. ABDULLAH'S REACTION WAS TO TELL ME STRAIGHT-FACEDLY THAT DESPITE PROBLEMS THAT EXIST, HE COULD

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ASSURE ME THAT AFGHANISTAN INTENDS TO MAINTAIN ITS EXISTING BASICALLY FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH IRAN.

12. COMMENT: NONE OF THIS, GIVEN THE LONG HISTORY OF AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS, SHOULD SURPRISE US. BUT IT IS ALSO NOT IN OUR INTEREST THAT THESE TWO COUNTRIES SHOULD QUARREL. AS THE

LARGER, RICHER NEIGHBOR THE BURDEN OF "STATESMANSHIP" MAY FALL TO IRAN, THOUGH WE REALIZE THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT IN THE FACE OF A GRATUITOUS EVENT LIKE THE PROJECTION OF A LOWER HELMAND DAM OF DUBIOUS ECONOMIC BENEFIT AND UNCHARTED ECOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES. NEVERTHELESS, IT WOULD SEEM TO BE IN IRAN'S INTEREST TO BE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 KABUL 2495

LIMDIS

SOMEWHAT ACCOMMODATING TO AFGHANISTAN'S SENSITIVITIES AND SOMEWHAT FORBEARING IN ORDER TO TIE AFGHANISTAN CLOSER TO THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD. PERHAPS THE SHAH COULD BE PERSUADED TO SEPARATE THE HELMAND FROM OTHER AFGHAN-IRANIAN ENDEAVORS SUCH AS IRANIAN AID TO AFGHANISTAN'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. I HOPE THAT AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN CAN HAVE A DISCUSSION ALONG THESE LINES WITH THE SHAH AT ONE OF HIS EARLY AUDIENCES AFTER HIS ARRIVAL IN TEHRAN. INCIDENTALLY, THE DEPARTURE OF AFGHAN AMBASSADOR GHAZI FROM TEHRAN SHOULD HELP SOMEWHAT BECAUSE IT IS MY IMPRESSION THAT HE OFTEN FAILS TO CONVEY TO THE IRANIANS THE STRENGTH OF FEELING WHICH EXISTS IN KABUL ON MATTERS IN DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. END COMMENT.
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